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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 002418

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W, DRL, AND INR

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TAGS: [NI](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AGAINST GOVERNOR NGIGE?

REF: LAGOS 2353 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne per 1.4 b and d

1. (C) Summary: The Anambra State crisis continues to replay itself like a B-rated soap opera. Nigerian press reported that on November 29 gunmen attempted to assassinate embattled Anambra Governor Chris Ngige, presumably at the behest of his nemesis -- the presidentially connected, Chris Uba (reftels). The Anambra police and even a member of Ngige's staff contradict the press' reports. Meanwhile, on November 30, the Enugu Court of Appeal ruled that a lower court lacked jurisdiction to remove Ngige from office. While this court decision may result in the full return of Ngige's security detail, it will not resolve the Anambra crisis. Ngige and Uba continue to talk, but thus far have failed to reach agreement. President Obasanjo has yet to step in decisively to bring this embarrassing drama to a close. End Summary.

Assassination Attempt Against the Governor? Probably Not.

2. (U) On Tuesday, November 30, virtually all Nigerian dailies led with reports of a thwarted assassination attempt against Anambra State Governor Chris Ngige. Respected newspapers headlined, "Ngige escapes assassination in Awka," and reported a sudden fusillade as pre-positioned assassins took aim on the Governor's convoy. Ngige and members of the Senate Committee on State and Local governments were touring the government buildings that had been burned November 10-11 when the shootings occurred, allegedly forcing them to scamper for cover.

3. (C) However, Anambra State Police Commissioner Felix Ogbaudu and members of Ngige's own staff contradicted these press reports in conversations with PolChief. Ogbaudu, present at the time of the shootings, said mobile police (MoPol) assigned to Ngige fired into the air as the convoy approached its visit site. Apparently Mopol believed "area boys" associated with Uba were in the vicinity. Ogbaudu insisted, however, that no area boys were present. (Note: MoPol comes under a separate command structure than the State police. End Note.)

4. (C) Ogbaudu blasted the press for "repeatedly telling lies." He vented, "Where are the cars allegedly riddled with bullet holes as a result of this assassination attempt? Where are the bodies of the 27 people the newspapers said were killed during the November 10-11 arsons? No one was killed earlier this month and there was no assassination attempt on Monday." Ogbaudu said Nigerian journalists publish what they are paid to write, without regard to truth or to the public impact. Ogbaudu asserted that for Ngige and Uba, the press was but a tool in their base attempts to achieve their respective political ambitions and to demonize the other.

5. (C) Chucks Akunna, Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, told Polchief the Ngige team had heard earlier in the day that Uba's faction was planning to demonstrate near the sites they were to visit. Akunna, who was inside the burned Anambra Broadcasting Station as the convoy approached, said the governor's MoPol fired into the air to disperse the crowd. Akunna said Mopol fired because they claimed armed men were among the demonstrators. Akunna confirmed there was no return fire from the crowd. Akunna believed that one person had been injured, but did not have any further details.

(Comment: Ogbaudu is not exactly a neutral observer, he is presumably allied with Uba. Ogbaudu has been accused of standing idly by while armed bands burned government buildings earlier in the month. Some even accused the police of abetting the marauders and Ngige has called for Ogbaudu's replacement. However, the separate account given by Akunna, a Ngige man, tracks, more or less, with Ogbaudu's report. There does not appear to have been an assassination attempt. End Comment.)

... Meanwhile Court Rules in Favor of Governor Ngige

16. (U) Meanwhile, on November 30, the Nigerian Court of Appeal, sitting in Enugu State, vacated the January 2 order of a lower Enugu court, which directed that Ngige be removed from office. It was this lower court order that spurned the Nigerian Inspector of Police to remove Ngige's security detail. A court in Awka, capital of Anambra, had earlier set aside the lower court's ruling, ushering in the show-down at the Appeal Court.

17. (C) Ngige's press secretary and Ngige's senior adviser (who also happens to be Ngige's elder sister) told Polchief separately that the governor was pleased and relieved by the court decision. They hoped this decision would result in the full restoration of Ngige's security detail. Both expected, however, that Uba's faction would appeal to the Supreme Court in Abuja.

Comment

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18. (C) Governor Ngige, State Assembly Speaker Balonwu, State Secretary Chukwura, and various other state officials have cloaked themselves in the mantle of "besieged victim," blithely failing to note that the governor stole the election in the first instance. They claim, for example, that they sleep in different houses every night; that they've sent their wives and children into hiding; that Uba is monitoring their phone calls, etc., etc. Speaker Balonwu's conversations with Mission staff have been particularly dramatic with him accusing President Obasanjo, and by "its non-action," the USG, of supporting "state terrorism." Uba's camp probably does wish a plague on the governor's house -- at least as long as Ngige is its occupier; and the ill will is probably reciprocated. There may even be some in the Uba faction prepared to harm the governor. However, in our view, Ngige and entourage now may be overplaying the "victim role." Anambra would be better served if they spent more energy seriously trying to resolve the crisis in the state, and less time in the press conference room.

BROWNE